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SUBJECT: ANAMBRA ELECTIONS: REVERSALS OF FORTUNE

REF: 04 LAGOS 2353

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (D & E)

11. (C) Summary. Over the last month, five Anambra State election results from 2003 have been overturned, and the original PDP candidates installed. This tussle is not so much one to recognize the real electoral victor but one to see which PDP faction controls the state. For most of these elections, APGA probably was the genuine victor. The most high profile case was that of Ben Obi, former Special Advisor to the National Security Advisor and an ally of Vice President Atiku and thus an enemy to Chris Uba, the Obasanjo loyalist who has tried to dominate PDP machinery in Anambra. In a series of meetings, Obi offered his perspectives on the illegitimacy of the electoral process, the interference in Anambra State politics by President Obasanjo, and the determination of the Anambra populace to resolve the crisis and gain control over their political future. End Summary.

Five Anambra Elections Overturned

12. (U) After 19 months of court battles, public scrutiny from the media, and pressure from his supporters in Anambra, Ben Obi's was the first seat to be returned to the original People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate. Following this ruling, four similar cases were resolved in February: Senator Joy Emordi (Anambra North) replaced Emman Anosike and in the House Golie Agbakoba (Onitsha) replaced Jessie Balonwu, Chief Alphonsus Igbeke (Anambra East/West) replaced Chief Raphael Okeke, and finally Chudi Offodile lost his seat to Chief O.C. Egwuatu who now represents the Awka North and South Federal constituency.

13. (U) Backdrop: The elections in Anambra were among the most convoluted in what can only be considered, as a whole, a rather bad crop of elections in 2003. First, the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) probably carried the majority of the races but the PDP slate was declared victorious. Second, after the initial pro-Atiku slate was deemed to have won, machinations within the PDP further sullied the results. After the election results were announced, Chris Uba engineered a replacement of the pro-Atiku candidates with his own pro-Obasanjo slate of candidates. It was these candidates that the Electoral Commission initially declared as winners notwithstanding the fact that their names had neither appeared on any ballots nor had they campaigned. The rationale accepted for the 13th hour change was that the party, not the individual candidates, was what the voters had backed. Thus, the party was at liberty to change candidates even after the voting had ended.

Obi Implicates Obasanjo in the Election Fiasco

14. (C) Obi told us President Obasanjo personally blocked his assumption of office. Obi said he engendered Obasanjo's animosity when he criticized the role millionaire businessman (and Obasanjo loyalist) Chris Uba was playing in the state. Obi said Obasanjo "flew into a rage" and that Obi's been in the president's bad graces ever since. Obi continued that Obasanjo's camp sees him as a threat because he "will not do anybody's bidding" and that because he refuses to be a member of Obasanjo's network, he is in direct conflict with the President and his minions.

15. (C) According to Obi, following a late night meeting where all the senators agreed to swear him in, Obasanjo called Senate President Adolphus Wabara, ordering the Senate President to stop Obi from assuming his senate seat. In fact, Obi was not sworn in on February 1 as originally scheduled. Instead, the Senate asked for a further clarification of the Certificate of Return. Obi insisted this delay was Wabara's attempt to appease Obasanjo. Obi was finally sworn in the following day after the INEC Chairman

testified Obi was the rightful victor of the election for the Anambra Central Senatorial district.

16. (C) Obi was intensely critical of the President's "personal meddling" in Anambra. He said that Obasanjo has a vested interest in keeping Anambra unstable, so that its leaders cannot pose a threat to his power. He emphatically stated the President's disregard for government property and citizen welfare during the October 2004 riots was "criminal" (ref A). Obi said that he himself would take Obasanjo to court for the President's criminal neglect during these incidents and for his unwillingness to resolve the conflict. (Comment: This threat is empty bluster by Obi, but he indicated that he plans to pursue judicial action to recover the salary arrears for the two years he should have occupied his senate seat prior to being sworn in. We have not seen any action to date on either of these complaints. End Comment).

Alliances Forming Against Common Enemies

17. (C) Prior to his election, Obi acknowledged that he and Wabara had an adversarial relationship. However, after taking the oath of office, Obi said that he went to Wabara and told him that his only intention was to "serve the interests of his people" and that he would go to any committee where Wabara wanted him to serve. He told Wabara that he has no aspiration to be Senate Chair. Wabara accompanied Obi on his most recent trip to Lagos, making a public show of their alliance and support for one another. Senator Obi was named Chairman of the Senate Service Committee.

18. (C) Obi said that he and Governor Ngige had also previously had stark ideological and political differences. But now, because they have Obasanjo as a common enemy, they are allied. The public's dislike of Uba has also redounded to Ngige's benefit, according to Obi. Ngige is regarded as the underdog and the public sympathizes with a person who would do battle with the highest power. Moreover, Ngige has managed to make public services function, despite the destruction of some of the official buildings where they are housed. Another prominent Anambra traditional leader agreed saying, "Ngige is paying salaries."

19. (C) Obi supports the concept of national dialogue and said that just after he was sworn in, he tried to convince his fellow senators to support the National Political Reform Conference. Obi told us "they should not be frightened or feel threatened, because anything that is decided must come back to them to be ratified". However, Obi believes that the conference is being presented to advance Obasanjo's own political agenda to achieve the third term the president so "desperately wants".

Comment

10. (C) All of the newly installed representatives as well as those who they replaced are from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). These recent events underscore the fractured nature of the party and the manipulation of INEC and the electoral process by PDP leaders in order to serve its interests. In all of these cases, the courts determined that INEC has no power under the 1999 constitution to invalidate an election result that has already been declared. The election reversals show that the judicial process has proved to be somewhat effective, albeit slow, in restoring a modicum of integrity to the electoral process.
BROWNE